



Picture of Ease

By: Polly Campbell

Creating art may calm your stress – even if you’re not an artist.

You don’t have to paint like Picasso to benefit from drawing a picture or creating a collage. A small study in the journal Art Therapy found art making – drawing, making collages, or molding clay – even for just 45 minutes lowered levels of the stress hormone cortisol in people, regardless of their creative ability. And numerous studies link high levels of cortisol to inflammation and greater pain sensitivity. While some study participants found the experience relaxing, others liked the creative self-expression.

Making art can be a way to manage stress and pain, agrees Cathy Malchiodi, PhD, a psychologist and art therapist in Louisville, KY, who works with people affected by chronic illness and trauma. Creating something with your hands can also mitigate depression and anxiety, she says.

Here are some artistic ways to relax:

Doodle or sketch. Drawing or doodling can calm you, open and clear your mind, and even improve concentration, Malchiodi says. If starting with a blank piece of paper feels intimidating, she suggests drawing or tracing a circle on the page and then filling it in with colors, lines, and other details.

Create a visual journal. Fill the pages of a journal or notebook with drawings, pictures, inspiring quotes, and other text. Use colors you prefer, and don’t worry about the quality of the work – just capture ideas and images.

Make a collage. Use paper scraps, magazine images, photographs, cloth remnants, and other materials to create a new shape or image.

Shape a sand tray. Feeling textures and creating three-dimensional scenes can be meditative as well as creative. Pour some sand on a pizza pan or in a plastic bin. Add decorative objects, action figures, or other items, then create scenes or images by making patterns in the sand and arranging the objects.

Mold clay. Sculpting shapes and figures with your hands also has stress-relieving benefits – plus it can aid stiff fingers, Malchiodi says. Use modeling clay (or even Play-Doh), then knead and sculpt your stress away.

Source: Arthritis Today

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